Message From Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower ¹

London, August 27, 1956

[...] I have no doubt that the bear is using Nasser, with or without his knowledge, to further his immediate aims. These are, I think, first to dislodge the West from the Middle East, and second to get a foothold in Africa so as to dominate that continent in turn. In this connection I have seen a reliable report from someone who was present at the lunch which Shepilov gave for the Arab Ambassador. There the Soviet claim was that they “only wanted to see Arab unity in Asia and Africa and the abolition of all foreign bases and exploitation. An agreed, unified Arab nation must take its rightful place in the world”[...] Meanwhile the Communist bloc continue their economic and political blandishments towards the African countries which are already independent. Soon they will have a wider field for subversion as our colonies, particularly in the West, achieve self-government. All this makes me more than ever sure that Nasser must not be allowed to get away with it this time. [...] It is also one of the reasons why we have to continue our military preparations in conjunction with our French allies. [...] 

Message From President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden ²

Washington, September 2, 1956

[...] As for the Russians, it is clear that they sought, at London, to impede the consolidation of majority point of view, and to generate an atmosphere in the Near East which would make it impossible for Nasser to accept our proposal. I entirely agree with you that the underlying purpose of their policy in this problem is to undermine the Western position in the Near East and Africa, and to weaken the Western nations at home. We must never lose sight of this point. [...] I am afraid, Anthony, that from this point onward our views on the situation diverge [...] I must tell you frankly that American public opinion flatly rejects the thought of using force, particularly when it does not seem that every possible peaceful means of protecting our vital interest has been exhausted without result [...] I really do not see how a successful result could be achieved by forcible means. The use of force would, it seems to me, vastly increase the area of jeopardy. [...] Also the peoples of the Near East and of North Africa and, to some extent, of all of Asia and of all Africa, which be consolidated against the West to a degree which, I fear, could not be overcome in a generation and, perhaps, not even in a century particularly having in mind the capacity of the Russians to make mischief. Before such action were undertaken, all our peoples should unitedly understand that there were no other means available to protect our vital rights and interests. We have two problems, the first of which is the assurance of permanent and efficient operation of the Suez Canal with justice to all concerned. The second is to see that Nasser shall not grow as a menace to the peace and vital interest of the West. In my view, these two problems need not and possibly cannot be solved simultaneously and by the same methods, although we are exploring further means to this end. The first is the most important for the moment and must be solved in such a way as no to make the second more difficult. [...] 

Message From Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower ³

London, September 6, 1956

[...] There is no doubt as to where we are agreed and have been agreed from the very beginning namely that we should do everything we can to get a peaceful settlement. [...] But unless we can proceed with this or something very like it what should the next step be? You suggest that this is where we diverge. If that is so I think that the divergence springs from a difference in our assessment of Nasser’s plan and intentions. May I set out our view of the position. In the 1930’s Hitler established his position by a series of carefully planned movements. These began with the occupation of the Rhineland and were followed by successive acts of aggression against Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the
West. His action were tolerated and excused by majority of the population of Western Europe […] In more recent years Russia has attempted similar tactics. The blockade of Berlin was to have been the opening move in a campaign designed at lest to deprive the Western Europe of their whole position in Germany. On this occasion we fortunately reacted at once with the result that the Russian design was never unfolded. But I am sure that you would agree that it would be wrong to infer from this circumstance that no Russian design existed. Similarly the seizure of the Suez Canal is, we are convinced, the opening gambit in a planned campaign designed by Nasser to expel all Western influence and interests from Arab countries. He believes that if we can get away with this and if he can successfully defy eighteen nations his prestige in Arabia will be so great that he will be able to mount revolution of young officers in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. […]

The difference which separates us today appears to be a difference of assessment of Nasser’s plans and intentions and of the consequences in the Middle East of military action against him. You may feel that even if we are right it would be better to wait until Nasser has unmistakeably unveiled. But this was the argument which prevailed in 1936 an which we both rejected in 1948. […] We have many times led Europe in the fight for freedom. It would be an ignoble end to our long history if we tamely accepted to perish by degrees. […]

Message From President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden ¹

Washington, September 8, 1956

[…] But permit me to suggest that when you use phrases in connection with the Suez affair, like “ignoble end to our long history” in describing the possible future of your great country, you are making of Nasser a much more important figure than he is…The place where we apparently do not agree is on the probable effects in the Arab world of the various possible reactions by the Western world. […] The use of military force against Egypt under present circumstances might have consequences even more serious than causing the Arabs to support Nasser. It might cause a serious misunderstanding between our two countries because I must say frankly that there is as yet no public opinion in this country which is prepared to support such a move, and the most significant public opinion that there is seems to think that the United Nations was formed to prevent this very thing.

² Ibid., pp. 355-358.
³ Ibid., pp. 400-403.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 435-438.